



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

Policy Portion 2004/3

A quality rural placement system for health students

Rural placements for health undergraduates are an important part of their preparation for rural or remote practice. More than that, if there was capacity in the rural system, rural placements could usefully be incorporated into *all* curriculums for the intrinsic value they offer, regardless of whether the individual sees a future in rural areas after graduation. Currently this capacity does not exist. (Regular training time spent in rural or remote areas will also contribute to the recruitment and retention of health professionals for rural and remote areas.)

The long-term efforts of GP organisations and the responsiveness of government have meant that there is a high quality system in place for medical undergraduates. There is an urgent need for State and Territory investment in the infrastructure and facilities that will provide a placement system with equality for students of medicine, nursing, allied health, health management, pharmacy and dentistry.

The Alliance would like to see all parties involved move towards collaborative placements in which health students from the various professions have greater opportunity to study and go on placements together. This does not necessarily require consistent curriculums across universities or professions, but utilisation of the opportunities provided by different curriculums with some common parts and by group placements.

Rural placements are invaluable opportunities for all students to work in unique clinical environments and they must not be regarded as 'extra' or optional placements when sufficient places cannot be found in the cities. There should always be specific learning objectives developed for rural, remote and multi-disciplinary placements.

Recommendations:

The Australian Government should lead work with the States and Territories, the Universities and relevant professional and community groups to agree on national standards for the elements required in a high quality rural placement system: accommodation, assistance with travel, and support for mentoring by existing practitioners. This national standard should be applied through regional programs that fit the particular needs and characteristics of the area concerned.

The Australian Government should negotiate agreements with the Universities for them to develop curriculums that incorporate the rural and remote context, and are inclusive of mandatory placements in these locations.